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LETTER DATED 8 JUNE 1988 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF INDONESIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

I have the honour to refer to the statement made by His Excellency Mr. Mario Soares, President of Portugal, on 8 June 1988 before the fifteenth special session of the General Assembly, the third special session devoted to disarmament, in which he regretfully saw fit to allude to East Timor in a manner totally unacceptable to the Government and people of Indonesia. It should also be noted in this regard that this non-issue is of no relevance to the important questions under consideration at the special session.

In his statement President Soares asserted that a so-called "invasion" of East Timor took place in 1975, that there exists a "conflict" situation in the province, that "access is denied to outside observers" and he reiterated the right of the people "to express itself and to defend its religious and cultural identity". The Portuguese President also made mention of "the need for negotiations" and "expressed his support for the progress report of the Secretary-General" issued on 8 September 1987 and contained in document A/42/539.

First, the statement is self-contradictory, since the said progress report refutes the wholly unfounded allegation leveled by the President of Portugal that the province is closed to outside observers. Paragraphs 9 through 15 of the report contain a detailed description, inter alia, of the extensive activities of international humanitarian organizations, including the United Nations own agencies, that have been carried out in East Timor for many years now, and state that among the many foreign visitors to East Timor there have been Portuguese journalists and members of the Portuguese Parliament, who were in East Timor in 1986 and 1987. Scores of visits have been made to East Timor by representatives of the ICRC, UNICEF, CRS and WHO, and by dignitaries and journalists. Moreover, as is also noted in the Secretary-General's report, there exists the possibility for a Portuguese Parliamentary delegation to undertake a visit to East Timor and to which Indonesia has responded positively. Hence, based on the foregoing we had hoped that Portugal would have by now ceased indulging in such gross misrepresentations.

Second, as to the Portuguese President's assertion that the world is unaware of the dramatic conflict situation in East Timor, we should like to respectfully point out that this is so because there is in fact no conflict in East Timor. It should be obvious that the progress in the development of East Timor, the extensive visits by foreign representatives and the presence of numerous international agencies could only take place in an environment of political stability and security.

The real dramatic situation in East Timor is the prodigious efforts being made in overcoming the legacy of backwardness and neglect that characterized the 450 years of colonial rule, through the accelerated development of the province in all spheres of life - economic, political, social - as well as the protection of cultural and religious rights.

Third, concerning the so-called invasion of East Timor in 1975, the historical record shows that Indonesia by its pronouncements and its actions clearly demonstrated its adherence to the principles governing the due process of self-determination and decolonization, while endeavouring to respond as correctly and restrainedly as possible to the chaotic and tragic circumstances which unfortunately accompanied that process in East Timor. Far from invading and occupying another country, or for that matter engaging in any hostilities against the people of East Timor, Indonesia's role has been one of contributing to the process of decolonization of that territory by helping to ensure that in its essence and realization the democratically expressed will of the majority not be overruled by the armed terror and unilateral imposition of a minority.

The events that transpired during the latter part of 1975 were not of Indonesia's making and it is Portugal which must bear full responsibility for the civil war in East Timor. In fact, it abandoned the territory at the height of the upheaval early in August 1975, after practically instigating the strife by clandestinely turning over its arms and munitions to one particular political group.

It should come as no surprise that the East Timorese people considered the Portuguese as having reneged on their obligations and therefore believed themselves to be no longer bound to any decolonization covenant with the erstwhile colonial Power and assumed the legitimate right and responsibility to determine their own fate. This they did by choosing independence through integration with Indonesia, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) and principles VI, VIII and IX of resolution 1541 (XV).

All of the foregoing gives rise to doubt as to the veracity of President Soares' assurance that there is a "need for negotiations that may allow us to reach a solution for that territory that will be internationally acceptable". Indeed, the question arises whether the Government of Portugal remains committed to continuing in good faith the dialogue with Indonesia under the auspices of the Secretary-General.

For its part, Indonesia remains prepared to co-operate with the Secretary-General and with Portugal in exploring ways to achieve a settlement to a question which in its view has long since ceased to be an issue at all. For this,

however, there should be an unequivocal reassurance from Portugal that it too remains genuinely committed to this goal. But clearly such a settlement can be based only on objective realities and the full facts of the situation and not on fiction or even less on misrepresentations.

Finally, it is to be stressed that one cannot, on the one hand, laud efforts to have a quiet and constructive exchange while, on the other hand, one party takes the liberty to continue to heap unfounded accusations and repeat all sorts of slanderous depictions of the situation in East Timor without expecting a response in setting the record straight.

I shall be grateful if you would kindly arrange for this letter to be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Nana S. SUTRESNA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative